

5 - FIRST REFORMED CHURCH OF WICHERT
BOUND TOGETHER IN CHRIST
BLEST BE THE TIE THAT BINDS OUR HEARTS IN CHRISTIAN LOVE!
THE FELLOWSHIP OF KINDRED MINDS IS LIKE TO THAT ABOVE.

"Union Makes Strength"

(Source: <https://frcwichert.yolasite.com/history.php>)

1891-1898

About one hundred and sixteen years ago several families living in Roseland, Illinois began looking for farmland suitable for raising vegetables. Fifty miles south near a railroad 'flag stop' called Palmer, they found sand loam soil that looked promising to them.

John Koster and his family were among the first families to move there in 1891. They purchased property in the area and soon the railroad 'flag stop' was renamed Koster.

On Sundays, these families would meet in different homes to worship. Their desire was to have a Reformed Church. By working with the Classis of Wisconsin, the Reformed Church of Koster was organized on January 20, 1893. There were 15 members; five came on confession of faith, and ten were received by letter from other churches.

On February 21, 1893 Cornelius Voss and Gerrit Kroeze were installed as elders and John Koster and Cornelius Tallman were installed as deacons. The site of the first building of worship was located near Koster. (9411 E. 2500 S. Rd) This shed-like building served a dual purpose. One end stabled horses, while the other end served as a place for worship. Sometimes during the service the restlessness of the horses could be a little distracting.

It was six years before the church had an ordained minister. Once a month, by classical appointment, the church was supplied by a visiting minister. Other Sundays elders led the services. Students from Western Theological Seminary would serve the church during the summer. The people, recent Holland immigrants, and not too familiar with the English language, held church services in the Dutch language.

The names of some church members near the turn of the century were Voss, Kroeze, Koster, Tallman, Poolman, Van Tongeren, Schaafsma, Westerhoff, Piersma, Brooksma, Slingerland, Hoekstra, and Pursma. Several family names of these early members are still in our church today.

As we look upon our history we thank God for these early settlers in our community, who by the grace of God, saw the need to be bound together in fellowship with each other and Christ.

In 1895, the church was incorporated under the name of First Reformed Church of Koster. Worship services were held in the original barn-like structure until 1898.

Two years after these first families moved to Koster, a man from Chicago by the name of Henry Wichert built a pickle factory three miles to the south. The railroad established an office there and named it Wichert. The next year the government organized a post office in Wichert.

1898-1903

Two acres of land were donated and deeded to the Koster Church on February 28, 1898. A new church was built on this property (3795 S. 8500 E. Rd.), which was 3/4 miles northwest of Wichert. The same year, the churches in the Wisconsin Classis took up a collection to help this young congregation. With that money, plus what their own members could give and by donating all the labor, the church was debt free within two years. Since the new church was built nearer to Wichert, the congregation wanted to change the name from Koster to Wichert. This decision was unanimous with the congregation and it was approved by classis. However, in 1902 they were told that to incorporate under a new name, court costs would be \$25.00. Money was so scarce it was decided to retain the name of First Reformed Church of Koster. Ten years later (1912) the name was changed.

Their first ordained minister, Rev. T Vanden Bosch served from October 1899 to may 1901. He resided in DeMotte, Indiana and held services at the Wichert church one week and DeMotte the next. He served this way for 19 months, then served the DeMotte church full time. The church had grown to 52 members by 1900. There were 18 families, with a Sunday School attendance of 42.

Retaining the tradition they were used to, men would sit on one side of the church, and women on the other. This tradition gradually changed in the early 1900's. During the latter part of 1900, the consistory requested \$400.00 from the classis to build a parsonage on the church property. The church borrowed from the bank because the farmers were anxious to build the parsonage before their spring field work began. It was a year before they received the requested money from the classis. The parsonage was constructed by volunteer labor, in the same manner the church had been built. There were some carpenters and many willing hands in the church.

Rev. Anthony Vander Werf preached at the new church during the summer while he was still in Western Theological Seminary. When he graduated in 1901, he accepted the call to come to Wichert. he was the first pastor to live in the new parsonage. Rev. Vander Werf also served two congregations. He alternated Sundays between the Wichert church and a mission in Goodland, Indiana. The Chicago & Eastern Illinois Railroad had a branch running from Momence, through Hopkins Park, then southeast through

Goodland. Every other Sunday, some boy from the congregation would take Rev. Vander Werf by horse and buggy to the depot in Hopkins Park. From there he would take the train to Goodland, and return the following Monday.

In 1902, at a congregational meeting, approval was given to the ladies to start a sewing circle. the president of this group was Mrs. Annie Schaafsma Vander Werf ... a local girl who married the preacher. Realizing the importance of music in the church, a choir, named the "Singing Society" was organized in 1902 under the direction of Marin Spoolstra. Rev. Vander Werf accepted another call in 1903 and the position was vacant for the next twelve months. When the pulpit wasn't filled by classical appointment an elder would lead the service and read a sermon in the Dutch language.

1904-1911

Rev. Herman Tanis ministered to the congregation from April 1904 to July 1905. He was a recent graduate of Western Theological Seminary. So many Dutch families were moving into the area, the church membership had a very rapid growth. When Rev. Tanis accepted another call the church was without a pastor for about 10 months.

Rev. John Webenga came in 1906. With monetary help from the classis, his annual salary was \$625.00. He, his wife, and three children came from the United Presbyterian Church. The congregation provided a horse and buggy to be used by the preacher's family, which was also used for the deacons' work relating to the church. The 1906 annual financial report was:

- Income: \$464.68
- Expense: \$451.79
- Balance: \$12.89

In 1907 a barn was built behind the church to house the pastor's horse and buggy. By then Rev. Webenga was the proud owner of two lively gray horses. In 1908, *Teunis Romein* was appointed by the Chapel Organ. Previously *Mr. Romein* was the song starter, or voorzinger. The first organist of the church was Albert Slingerland who played a little reed organ for several years. That same year the consistory gave permission for the young people to purchase a bell for the church tower. One of the young men, *Harry Romein* was the chairman of the committee, and a bell was purchased from the Sears, Roebuck & Co. This bell is still in use today.

With adequate ditching of the land and drainage to carry off the excess water, a greater area became very productive for vegetable farming. This attracted many more families to move to the area, and soon the church building was too small. In 1909 it was enlarged by 24 feet. In 1910 the janitor and his family were renting a home from Mr. Peter DeGroot. The church purchased this house for \$200.00. So the janitor could live near

the church, it was decided to move the house to the church property. With the aid of several men, the house was lifted on planks and pulled with a team of horses. They ran into difficulty maneuvering a turn in the road. By then it was quite late in the day, and being a Saturday, they unhitched the horses and left the house where it was. The janitor and his family lived in it until Monday morning when the men once again attempted to move the house. Much to their dismay, the kitchen fell off before the move was completed, resulting in additional work to attach and repair the kitchen. The janitor had a rent free house to live in and a salary of \$3.00 a month.

To take the offering in church, the deacons would pass a bag on the end of a long stick. This had the nickname of "The Penny Snatcher," and most of the collection came in pennies and other small change. After passing the collection bags, they would hang on pegs on the church wall until after the worship service.

At that time everyone used the same cup when they served communion. The janitor was responsible for preparing the elements, probably because he was able to be at the church more readily than the elders. His wife would bake bread and cut it into cubes for serving.

Worship services, in the Dutch language, were held on Sunday mornings and Sunday afternoons. Sunday School followed the afternoon services. For many years the pastor was referred to as "the Domine." Catechism was established by this time and the boys and girls were in separate classes. These classes were always taught by the domine. The pastor's wife was sponsor of the young girls' group, and almost always the president of the women's societies. Children weren't taken to church until they were of school age.

By 1910 the special music for church services was a double quartet of four women and four men. These were: *Josie Romein* and *Cornelia Stroo*, soprano; *Cora Meuzelaar** and *Nellie Westerhoff*, alto; *Jacob DeYoung* and *Richard Voss*, tenor; and *Peter Romein* and *Sam Boonstra*, bass. As they would practice in their homes, Nick Stroo accompanied them on a little "Reed" organ, as no one in those days had a piano. [**Garret DeMik's future wife*]

1912-1922

The Congregation called a seminary graduate in June of 1912. Rev. Martin Patterson accepted the call and served the church two years. It was 1912 when the name of the church was changed from The First Reformed Church of Koster to The First Reformed Church of Wichert. During Rev. Patterson's ministry the organ committee purchased a used Hinners organ for \$105.00. A special collection was taken on Easter Sunday to help meet the expense.

A very large hand-pumped pipe organ was purchased and installed in 1915. Albert Vander Vliet was the first of many men who pumped this organ. Nick Stroo, one of the early organists, served in that capacity for 27 years until December of 1934.

In June of 1914, the congregation obtained three acres from John and Katie Hoekstra to be used for a church cemetery. This property is located 1.5 miles northeast of the present church. Two years later a decision was made at a congregational meeting making the Reformed Church of Wichert the 'owners and overseers' of the cemetery, which is called the Oakwood Cemetery. The cemetery trustees map and sell lots and superintend the cemetery grounds. For several years tax dollars, through the St. Anne Twp Cemetery Association, have helped with the maintenance. Only about half of the cemetery has been used as of 1993.

Rev. Fred Zandstra, a recent graduate of Western Theological Seminary, accepted a call to come to Wichert in 1915. During his ministry, catechism in the English language was introduced. English was also used in the children's Sunday School.

On April 2, 1917, Congress declared war on Germany. Twenty-eight young men of the Reformed Church of Wichert were called to active service.

In 1918 the Great Influenza epidemic swept the nation. This was a sad and hard time and took a toll on the members. Several mothers died leaving small children. Many of the tombstones in the cemetery attest to the severity of this epidemic.

The Armistice was proclaimed on November 11, 1918, ending the first World War. One of the young men, *William DeMik*, was wounded in action, and two men, *Jacob Mulder* and *Joseph Romein*, died in camps during the epidemic of influenza.

Rev. James Vander Heide and his wife came to Wichert in February 1919 and served until October 1922. Mrs. Vander Heide was sponsor of the Girl's Mission Society. There were about 20 young girls in this group. Mrs. Vander Heide was also president of the ladies' Sewing Circle.

In 1920 a male quartet started meeting in the home of Richard Voss. Soon other men were interested and about two years later they combined and organized a double quartet of men's voices. They were: *Harry Romein* and *Albert Ritsema*, first tenor; *Herman Ritsema* and *Richard Sikma*, second tenor; *Richard Voss* and *John Bouchard*, baritone; *Art DeYoung* and *Peter Romein*, bass. Mrs. John Bouchard accompanied them on the piano. They often sang in their own church, as well as many area churches. The original quartet, *Harry Romein*, *Herman Ritsema*, *Richard Voss*, and *Art DeYoung* were still singing together until 1946.

1923-1934

Rev. Vander Heide left in 1922 and the church was without a pastor for a year and four months. During this vacancy it was decided to build a more adequate building for a parsonage. A new brick parsonage was built after moving the older house 1/4 mile to the

south, where it became the home of the John Hoekstra family.

Around this time, 28 members of the church signed the following petition: "We, the undersigned communicant members of the Reformed Church of Wichert, believing that the welfare of the church, as well as the future usefulness and spiritual life of our young people, depends on a greater use of the American language in our services, hereby respectfully petition the consistory to take such means as it may think best to find out the wish of the congregation so as to conduct the services every other Sunday afternoon in the American Language."

At a consistory meeting in 1923, a vote was taken to have English used in the afternoon worship service. There were 66 yes votes, and 44 no votes. Rev. Albert Baker accepted a call in 1924 to come to the Wichert Church. He pastored for 10 years. He, his wife and four children were the first family to live in the new parsonage.

On March 2, 1924, the Christian Endeavor, known as CE, was organized for the young people. A group known as Jonge Lijden Verenigen (Young Members Society) preceded CE. Since services were held on Sunday mornings and afternoons, this gave the youth of the church an opportunity for fellowship on Sunday evenings. Most of the young people joined CE at the age of 16 and continued into their late 20's, or until they were married. Because of the large age span, the group sometimes had over 50 young people in attendance.

The Helping Hand Society was organized in June of 1924 for the young married women. Mrs. Baker was the president, and there were 23 charter members. Their purpose was to help needy families and give aid to their own local church. Meetings were held the first Wednesday of every month and started at 8:00 p.m. In 1929 an amendment was made to hold their meeting on Thursday instead of Wednesday. Mrs. Baker was also sponsor of the Girls' Mission Society, and the name was changed to "Willing Workers." A new motor driven pipe organ was installed in 1924, which relieved those who had served as hand pumpers. The Board of Domestic Missions congratulated the Reformed Church of Wichert on assuming self-support in 1926.

The church grew spiritually and financially in the '20's. In 1928 there were 73 families, with a membership of 131. Eighty young people were enrolled in catechetical instruction. It was one of the years of highest financial giving. A need was felt in the hearts of the people to build a new house of worship. Their first step in 1928 was to request a loan of \$6,000.00 from the Board of Domestic Missions. This was granted.

The old building was moved and later used for a home before becoming a storage barn. During the process of building, church services were held in the Wichert Grade School. Other meetings were held in the parsonage.

By 1930 the new church was built at a cost of \$28,000.00. Much of the labor was donated by the members of the church, but before the loan was paid, the depression of the '30's came. Many sacrificed financially towards paying off the debt. Some families even took out personal loans to meet their pledges.

A beautiful new six and a half rank pipe organ, made by the Hinners Organ Company of Pekin, Illinois was installed at the steep price of \$3,000.00. The church has been blessed with faithful organists within the membership. In the 1920's Gertrude Schaafsma started playing when she was young girl, and continued for over 40 years. In addition to our current organists, other members who served many years were Ida Slingerland (14 years) and *Clara VanderMeer (30 years)*.

A church choir (which originally was the double quartet in 1922) gradually increased to about 30 members. A period between 1943 and 1952 the church had only a youth choir consisting of high school students. Adults would sing with them for the special Easter cantatas. Albert Ritsema was the choir director from 1930 to about 1952. Sometimes during this period, a pastor's wife, with musical ability, directed the choir.

1934-1943

Dr. John Wesselink started his ministry in Wichert in May of 1934. Prior to his coming to Wichert, he was President of Central College in Pella, Iowa. This was a time when the church was suffering from great financial difficulties because of the depression years in the early 1930's. It was during the latter years of his ministry that a beginning was made to pay off the indebtedness of the church. In 1934 a group of men, wanting to have a Bible Study, organized the "Wichert Men's Society." The meetings were conducted by laymen with the pastor as advisor. Through the years, this group financially supported mission work.

In order to unify the Christian Education efforts, a Sunday School Council was organized on January 3, 1936. This was a council where the classes were represented and included representatives from the consistory. Plans and decisions were made concerning the Sunday School program of the Church.

The Sewing Circle, started in 1902, was no longer in existence. The Helping Hand Society organized in 1924 for the young married women now consisted of older ladies who wished to meet in the afternoon rather than in the evening. In 1936 a group of seven ladies organized the Ladies' Aid and Mission Society, which met once a month.

Individual communion cups were first used in 1938.

Near the close of Dr. Wesselink's ministry, the Dutch language was discontinued and English was used entirely in all services. When Dr. Wesselink retired in 1940 the church

was without a pastor for only 3 months.

The next occupants of the parsonage were Rev. and Mrs. William Swets and their two children. Rev. Swets served two years.

A group of several young girls, under the direction of Mrs. Swets, was call "The Moonlight Mission Band." For a few years this group had the project of serving supper at the annual Sunday School picnic. This consisted of sandwiches, potato salad, and sliced tomatoes.

Japan attacked the United States Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941 and the United States declared war the next day. This marked the beginning of World War II, which lasted four years. In the conflict approximately 40 to 45 of our young people were called into service. Elmer Vollrath sacrificed his life for the cause.

The Library Committee was first organized as a part of the church program in January of 1942. Prior to this several ladies of the church would bring their books to be exchanged and read. Soon other organizations donated money each year to buy books. Children's books were purchased and the children were encouraged to read. All books had to have a Christian theme, no foul language, and read and approved by the library committee before they were accepted. The library committee continues to hold to these rules when accepting new books.

In the 1940's and 1950's the area was known as the largest single gladioli growing area in the United States. Gladioli were introduced in the 1920's, and a gradual transition to the gladioli bulb and flower business took place. This was very profitable to the framers and in 1942 the remainder of the church debt was paid.

Rev. Swets accepted a call to another church in September 1942.

1943-1955

The Mortgage Burning Ceremony was held on February 16, 1943. Dr. Wesselink and Rev. Swets each gave an address. The choir rendered three selections and the original male quartet sang. A half century of service and devotion to God had now come and gone.

In September 1943, Rev. John H. Bruggers accepted the call to serve the Wichert church. He and Mrs. Bruggers came with two of their three children. During his twelve years, the church increased in membership, reaching a total of 320 members. The missionary support increased rapidly in both domestic and foreign fields. In the early '40's, a deep sense of obligation to God for His bountiful blessings gave several members and urge to share with others the wonderful blessings of God. It was in this spirit that

the missionary enthusiasm was born. The support of a missionary was taken on privately by a few families of the congregation for one year. The second year this was made a congregational project so that all would have an opportunity to participate. In 1944 Rev. and Mrs. Garold Van Engen, working among the Indians of Chiapas, Mexico, were the first missionaries supported by the church.

A missions project among people living near the community was started in 1948. This was in Pembroke bordering the Wichert area to the east. Land was purchased by the Wichert church. Almost \$2,000.00 was donated for materials, and willing hands contributed most of the labor for the construction of the church. Volunteers would go every Sunday to aid them in their worship services by playing the piano and leading the worship. The Men's Society donated a slide projector. the Wichert church continued to have this mission project, titled "Pembroke Mission, sponsored by the First Reformed Church of Wichert" for several years.

The Wichert church was redecorated in 1947 and the next year a dedication service was held for the beautiful art memorial windows which had been installed. Additional building projects of the church were a new garage for the parsonage and a new janitor's house.

In 1948 there were three different organizations for women and girls:

- The Girls' Moonlight Mission Band with a membership of 24 girls
- The Ladies' Aid and Mission Society with a membership of 12 women
- The Helping Hand Society, grown to a total of approximately 80 women.

This last group consisted of both older and younger ladies. Many felt more could be accomplished in a smaller group, and the young ladies organized the Friendship Circle in 1948. There were 30 charter members and 8 were added in the first year.

In 1950 Communist North Korea invaded South Korea. For the third time in the history of our church, young people were called into service of our country. The United States sent troops to aid the South Koreans. Approximately 37 of our young men were in uniform. LaVerne Mulder received serious wounds in this conflict.

The spring of 1951 the congregation voted to change the order of Sunday services. The morning worship service would begin at 9:30 a.m., followed by Sunday School at 10:45 a.m. the second worship service would change from afternoon to evening at 7:00 p.m. Christian Endeavor was changed to Wednesday evening. This proved to be unsatisfactory to the young people and they began meeting Sunday evenings (6:00) prior to the worship service. there was a large group of 40 or so active members in CE.

Catechism classes were held October to May. The grade school children met Saturday afternoons. Classes were held on Wednesday evenings for the high school students.

In 1952 a Men's Chorus was organized under the direction of Neil Voss. They not only sang in their own church, this group sang in many churches in the surrounding area. At one time they presented a concert in Annville, Kentucky, and on several occasions they sang at the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago. A women's choir, organized in 1954, and later a mixed choir, were directed by one of the women members.

Two sons of the church entered the ministry while Rev. Bruggers was pastor. His own son, Glenn Bruggers, a graduate from Western Theological Seminary, and ordained at the Wichert Church in 1951, began mission work in Japan in 1952. Melvin Voss graduated from Western Theological Seminary and was ordained at the Raritan Reformed Church, Raritan, Illinois in 1955.

On November 12th and 13th of 1953, the church celebrated its 60th anniversary along with the 10th anniversary of Rev. Bruggers as pastor. Dr. Jacob Prins, Minister of Evangelism for the Reformed Church of America, was speaker at both services. Rev. Ted Zandstra, representing his father, (Wichert's 6th pastor) brought greetings and reminisced on past years.

The Sunday School picnic, which had been an annual event for several years, was held at the Wichert Grade School. Babies weren't brought to church services, so this was an opportunity for mothers to bring their little ones. Children from 3 to 5 years old had a parade of simple to elaborately designed floats. Games and contests were held during the afternoon. Women of the church served supper in the school gym. The annual event is now called the "All Church Picnic." There is no longer a children's parade. Other activities have been added and this is held at the St. Anne park.

Under the direction of Mrs. Bruggers, the Girls' Moonlight Mission Band became The Girls' League. they had a membership around 20 girls who met monthly. The League's purpose was to serve Christ as Lord and Savior, the church, the community, and the people around the world, especially those sponsored by the Reformed Church of America. Activities were an annual banquet with other churches of the classis, a hymn sing, a progressive supper, and a Mother/Daughter meeting held in April. This group would send "Care" packages to the college students. Because of so few members, the Girls' League was disbanded in 1990.

The Men's Society of 25 active members, met twice a month, except in the summer. They continued doing some mission work and projects such as providing a scholarship for seminary or college students. They also purchased a fertilizer spreader for the Mission in Annville, KY. This group continued meeting until the 1980's.

Rev. Bruggers was honored by having the Doctor of Divinity degree conferred on him by Hope College, Holland, Michigan, in June 1954. Dr. Bruggers left Wichert and retired from full time pastoring in the fall of 1955.

During the interim of 13 months between pastors, extensive remodeling was done to the parsonage. This included new kitchen cabinets and a new furnace. The living room was made larger by enclosing the front porch area and an outside entry was built to the southwest.

1956-1971

It was in December, 1956 when Rev. James Van Roekel came as the next pastor. He, his wife, and two small girls were here for the next 6 years.

January 1960 the ladies of the First Reformed Church of Wichert adopted the program suggested by the National Department of Women's Work and organized the Reformed Church Women's Guild for Christian Service. The guild consisted of women from the Helping Hand Society and the Friendship Circle. The membership of 105 ladies was divided into 5 circles. The circles met monthly for Bible study. Business was conducted at five annual guild meetings which had programs emphasizing missions.

In 1962 the CE reorganized as the Reformed Church Youth Fellowship, or RCYF. This organization of high school age boys and girls helps train our young people to be the future church leaders. They organize and conduct their own activities with help from adult sponsors. The aim of the RCYF is "For Christ and His Church."

During Rev. Van Roekel's ministry there was an urgent need for more worship space. The church building was too small for the growing congregation. Often chairs were set up in the aisles during worship service. Sunday School classes were held in hallways, the parsonage basement, and even in the parsonage garage when the weather was warm. Much time was spent on deciding how to enlarge the church to answer the need of more space. When the Simon Hoekstra family donated a site for erecting a new church building about a mile west, the majority of the members sanctioned this alternative.

A cornerstone laying ceremony was held on July 7, 1962. The cornerstone, bearing the day 1963, is the resting place of a water-tight time box containing the history of the Reformed Church of Wichert, current listings of members of the various organizations and contents which were removed from the previous church cornerstone. Rev. James Van Roekel presided over these ceremonies. In October of that same year he accepted the call to another church.

The memorial windows were taken from the old church and installed in the new building. Time and labor were donated by a member who did the wiring for speakers and a new sound system. The Hinners organ was removed and transferred to the new church. It was completely rebuilt and for ranks were added, along with a new console, at the cost of \$10,500.00. Time, labor, and many items were donated by members of the congregation. Some of the donations included a set of chimes for the organ, a Steinway

grand piano in the sanctuary, and an electric organ which is in the Fellowship Hall.

Our pulpit was vacant until March 1963 when a call was extended to the Rev. George C. Poppen. He accepted this call and the Rev. and Mrs. Poppen and their three children, David, Mark, and Janet moved into the parsonage.

The new church (7697 E. 4500 S. Rd.), cost about \$200,000.00. It has a seating capacity of 500 people in the sanctuary, and additional 100 in the balcony, and choir area which can seat 50. Besides a fellowship hall and approximately 20 classrooms, it also provides a choir room, a library, a pastor's study, a secretary's office, a consistory room, a cry room, six restrooms, and a kitchen.

There were three services to dedicate the new church building. The first service dedicating the church was held on Tuesday evening, June 11, 1963. Rev. James Van Roekel brought the message. Thursday evening the rebuilt organ was dedicated in a concert presented by Mr. Andrew Vogel of South Holland, Illinois. The following evening, June 14, a community night service was held and Dr. John Bruggers delivered the sermon.

For a period of time the grade school children's catechism classes were held on Wednesday afternoons at 3:45 p.m. In 1965 all classes were changed to Wednesday evenings to be held simultaneously with prayer meeting. The younger students are grounded in the teachings of the Bible, and the older students were oriented in the doctrines and teachings of the Reformed Church. High school age children were taught their catechism during the Sunday School session. This schedule is still in effect.

In the fall of 1965, Rev. Poppen's family moved into a new four-bedroom parsonage built across the road from the church on property provided by Richard Voss.

Once again there were those called to active service for our country during the long conflict in Vietnam. From 1966 to 1972 approximately fifteen young people of our church were in uniform. We praise the Lord that no lives were lost.

The 75th anniversary of the organization of the First Reformed Church of Wichert was celebrated in 1968. Rev. James Van Roekel gave the morning message on Sunday, June 16. Melvin Voss, son of the church, had a message during the Sunday School hour, and Rev. Swets delivered the evening message.

The community night service was held the following evening, Monday June 17. This was a time for surrounding churches to express their greetings and comments. "Dedicated Hearts and Hands" was the message brought by Dr. Bruggers.

The Pembroke Community Reformed Church was now self-supporting and no longer

one of our mission projects. In April 1970 the property, church, and parsonage were transferred to them from the First Reformed Church of Wichert.

During Rev. Poppen's ministry, Mrs. Poppen was very active in music. She was director of the mixed choir, the women's choir, and a choir for the children. She also taught music at the Wichert Grade School. This was very beneficial to the music program of our church, as well as to the community.

In January 1971, after serving since 1963, Rev. Poppen and his family left Wichert when he accepted a call to another church.

1972-1986

A son of the church, Dennis Mulder, graduated from Western Theological Seminary in 1972. He was ordained at the First Reformed Church of Wichert on June 15.

At a congregational meeting April 7, 1972, Peter Van Dyke was extended a unanimous call to serve as pastor upon completion of his schooling and ordination in June. He accepted the call. Rev. Peter Van Dyke, and his wife, Pat, came to Wichert after his graduation from Western Theological Seminary. Installation services were held on July 17, 1972.

1972 was a milestone year for the First Reformed Church of Wichert. The mortgage of the church was paid in full. Sunday, December 3rd, a special Mortgage Burning Ceremony was held. Rev. James Van Roekel, pastor of the church when the cornerstone was laid in 1962, gave the morning message. Rev. Van Dyke presided at the Mortgage Burning Ceremony which immediately followed.

The mortgage was paid and in the next few years attention was directed toward the improvement of the church building and extension of mission work. The mission budget for 1973 was increased by \$3,800.00 making a total mission budget of \$9,500.00.

In 1973 a tape ministry began. With consistory approval, cassette tapes were purchased and each week a recorder, along with a tape of the Sunday service, was taken to the shut-ins. This ministry has grown and tapes can be borrowed or purchased by any member of the church. 1973 was also the year red pew cushions were donated for the sanctuary. A dedication service was held for a newly completed steeple in April, and blacktopping the parking lot in the summer was a major improvement.

The church launched out in a radio ministry in September of 1975. With the help from a memorial fund designated for radio ministry and with congregational approval, this became a mission project. The one-half hour broadcast titled "Hope for Tomorrow" was aired each Sunday at 10:30 a.m. over the local Kankakee station. This ministry, starting

with Rev. Van Dyke as minister continued for six years. The last broadcast in December, 1981 was during Rev. Vander Ploeg's pastorate.

The first Christian Education and Youth Director at the Wichert church was Larry LePoire, an intern pastor. Larry and his wife, Judy, ministered to the young people for a period of two years, beginning in June, 1976.

Our country celebrated its 200th anniversary in 1976. The 4th of July fell on a Sunday and services were dedicated to this event with a patriotic theme. Pledges were made to both the Christian and the American flags, after which the National Anthem was sung. Rev. Van Dyke and Larry LePoire presented roll call of the 50 states, followed by the Battle Hymn of the Republic sung by the Men's Chorus.

On Sunday, January 3, 1977, Rev. Van Dyke's farewell message was delivered. He accepted a pastorate at Canyon Lake, California. Larry LePoire filled the pulpit for the next six months.

In the fall of 1977, Larry LePoire encouraged the church to minister to the junior high school boys and girls by organizing a Jr. RCYF. The weekly meetings were held on Wednesday evenings prior to catechism classes.

Installation services were held on September 20, 1977 for Rev. Elmer Vander Ploeg. He was the fifteenth pastor of the First Reformed Church of Wichert and served eight years. He, his wife, Bobbie, and young daughter, Julie, moved into the parsonage.

1978 - The Reformed Church in America celebrated its 350th anniversary

The Wichert Church celebrated this 350th anniversary on Sunday April 30th, 1978. The day was to be observed as their forefathers had observed Sunday worship. One family came in a 1931 Model A Ford. There were vivid printed bonnets and stiff-starched Dutch caps. Women wore fancy and plain dresses of a previous era. Even the men cooperated. Some came in black tails and high hats or black knickers with white knee socks, and even a Dutch-boy jacket or two. The Dutch language was used at the 9:30 morning service. A psalm, "To God be the Glory," was performed during the Sunday School hour. This described the emotions of a group of Hollanders committed to preserving their heritage, language, and Reformed faith as they settled in America.

Each family brought their noon lunch, and after eating and visiting, they held another service at 2:00 p.m. Rev. Vander Ploeg gave the message: "A church needs no timid Christians -- it needs BOLD Christians. Boldness supplied by the Holy Spirit."

Larry and Judy LePoire left Wichert in July 1978. The next Christian Education Director was Randall Dennis. A recent graduate of Olivet Nazarene College, he filled the position

from July 1, 1979 to June 30, 1980.

A Hispanic ministry became a reality on June 23, 1980. Pastor Eliezer and Mrs. Ortiz worked for a period of two years with the Hispanic residents and migrant workers in the community. These people now had an opportunity to hear the gospel in their own language. Rev. Ortiz held Sunday worship services in the redecorated building which originally was the Wichert grocery store. In appreciation, these people invited the congregation to a traditional Mexican meal which was served in the Fellowship Hall.

The position of Director of Youth in Christian Education was filled in September 1980 when the consistory approved a contract with Bob DeYoung. The following year, Bob DeYoung married. He and his wife, Julie, ministered to the young people until June 1986. Bob and Julie, working with the Jr. RCYF, helped 6th, 7th, and 8th graders develop a popular puppet ministry. They were asked to perform at Camp Minitoqua, St. Mary's Hospital, as well as our own church. The Jr. RCYF sponsored an annual "Young at Hearts" program for the senior citizens and also a "Sweetheart Banquet" for couples. These programs included an evening meal and entertainment by the young people.

"Koinonia" was a singing group composed of Sr. RCYF members. These high school age boys and girls had weekly Bible study along with many fun outings. They sponsored several events which helped them in their mission outreach. In 1985, the Sr. RCYF organized the Thanksgiving dinner for the people at Thresholds, a mental and rehabilitation center in our area.

Both the Sr. RCYF and the Jr. RCYF have had, and continue to have, young married couples and/or singles from our congregation as sponsors and co-sponsors. We commend these young adults who willingly give their time and talents for Christian direction and encouragement to the young people of the church.

The church often ministered to nursing homes and hospital residents. As early as 1950, women of the Friendship Circle visited the State Hospital patients. In the 1960's the adult Sunday School class made regular visits to the St. Anne Nursing Home residents on Sunday afternoons. For many years women of the RCW Guild collected old sheets, newspapers, and plastic to make disposable pads for Rest Haven Nursing Home.

In 1980 a ministry was started at Momence Meadows Nursing Home. Women of the church have faithfully continued biweekly Bible lessons at the nursing home on Wednesday afternoons. In conjunction with other area churches, our church conducts Sunday afternoon services four to five times a year. Summer picnics have been held for the residents, as well as an "Adopt-a-Grandparent" program with the grade school children. A group from the church known as the "Crafty Ladies" meet through the winter months to make small gifts. All the residents at Momence Meadows Nursing Home receive a handmade gift for Christmas and Easter.

Greg Dykstra, a son of the church, was ordained in 1981 at the East White Oak Bible Church in Carlock, Illinois after graduating the Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas.

Vacation Bible School started on an annual basis in 1982 under the direction of Bob DeYoung, Director of Christian Education. This is an outreach ministry to neighborhood children. Van service is provided for the one-week session. In 1992, with a record of 92, and as "GOD'S CHAMPIONS," the children correlated various sports equipment with the Armour of God. The boys and girls had memory work, songs and crafts with a sports theme. Many volunteers make VBS an exciting and learning experience with a challenge for commitment to Christ. The VBS program is still put on to this day and has had attendances up to 150 children.

An old-fashioned Box Social sponsored by Mrs. Vander Ploeg was held in May 1983. Those attending had many chuckles as the ladies' elaborately decorated picnic lunch boxes were auctioned to the highest bidder... and not always purchased by their respective husbands. The Box Social was the method a few women used to multiply their \$5.00 SEED MONEY given at the first of the year. Other members' SEED MONEY grew as they sold baked goods, jam, produce, or launched out with novel ideas. The church had a goal of \$6,000.00 for the "Van Engen Van Fund." The total raised was \$6,178.80. The Wichert church was supporting Rev. and Mrs. Charles Van Engen (son of Rev. and Mrs. Garold Van Engen) as missionaries to Mexico.

On June 5, 1983 the First Reformed Church of Wichert celebrated its 90th anniversary. Rev. Melvin Voss, a grandson of the first elder of the church, Cornelius Voss, delivered the morning message. Approximately 98% of those at the morning worship service came in Dutch costumes or old fashioned dress. During the regular Sunday School hour, the choir presented a cantata. Following the musical, a potluck lunch was held at the church. At this 90th anniversary of the church, the 20th anniversary of the present church building was also observed. Rev. George Poppen, our first pastor of the present sanctuary, gave the afternoon message.

A study of the Old and New Testaments known as "The Bethel Series" has been taught several years in the church. After attending a teaching course for this, Bob DeYoung taught an extensive course in our church to a few potential teachers. Under these teachers, the first two classes, held on Wednesday evenings, were open to the congregation in the fall of 1983.

August 1985 saw the completion of updating and enlarging the organ. This was done by the Wicks Pipe Organ Company of Highland, Illinois, at a cost of \$41,802.00. These improvements included adding 5 ranks to the present organ with 3 ranks being exposed at the front of the sanctuary. A solid state relay and switching system replaced the old mechanical contact system in the organ console. Much of the wiring, dating back to

1930, was replaced. The new organ was dedicated on the evening of October 27, 1985. Tim Nelson, a gifted organist from Olivet Nazarene College presented organ selections. Following the organ dedication service, a farewell social hour was held for Pastor Vander Ploeg and his family. Rev. Vander Ploeg accepted a call to the Silver Creek Reformed Church of Silver Creek, Minnesota.

After a 3-month trial period early in 1986, Sunday evening church services were changed from 7:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

On June 1, 1986 a farewell for Director of Youth Education, Bob and Julie DeYoung was held after the evening worship service.

1986-1993

Following Rev. Vander Ploeg's departure, the church was without a pastor for a period of one year. Rev. Herbert Bollman accepted the call extended to him by the congregation in October 1986. Installation services were held November 7. Rev. Herbert Bollman was born in Dixon, Illinois and raised in a rural farming community in Forreston, Illinois. In 1970 he married Sunday Lee Keener of Akron, OH. She is a registered nurse. They have three children: Johnathan (1975), Heather (1977), and Andrew (1979). Rev. Bollman was a graduate of the University of Illinois Chicago campus. In 1978 he graduated the Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas. he was ordained at the Ashton Bible Church in Ashton, Illinois serving there for two years. they moved to the Open Door Bible Church, Wyoming, Michigan. In the Spring of 1986 he was examined by the South Grand Rapids Classis and admitted into the Reformed Church of America in May 1986.

In January 1987 the consistory expanded committees of the church to include representatives from the congregation. This was a means of have a greater number of members from the congregation involved in church activities.

The first annual Mission Fest was held in our church October 1987. After a potluck dinner on Friday evening six mission stations were featured. A visit of about 15 minutes "in travel" to each station informed us of several missions. Subsequent Fest have limited the mission stations to four. We have learned about local programs, Reformed ministries, Bible translators, Portable Recording Missions, and many more. The Sunday offering is divided among the participating missions as designated by the Mission Committee and approved by the consistory. the offering averaged \$3,000.00 to \$4,000.00 annually.

November 1987, after prayerfully considering the program "Evangelism Explosion" the Evangelism Committee made a decision to send Rev. Bollman to a five-day Leadership Clinic in Arlington Heights, Illinois. The purpose of the Evangelism Explosion was to see lay people effectively trained to share the Gospel.

The beginning of Evangelism Explosion in our church was the fall of 1988, as Rev. Bollman met with two members to study and reach out into the community. Each year since then, new teams have been trained. Prayer partners were in prayer as the teams went to homes in the surrounding area. They shared the gospel and offered a follow-up program of Bible study.

We were without a Youth Director for a period of one year before Debra Prins came in July of 1987 to fill the position. She only stayed a few months.

The church's next Director of Youth and Christian Education was Dan Averill who accepted the position in 1988. Dan was born and grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In 1977 he married Linda Visser. they have three children, Patrick (1982), Philip (1984), and Megan (1986). Dan received a Bachelor of Science Degree from Grand Valley University in Allendale, Michigan, and a Bachelor of Religious Education from Reformed Bible College in Grand Rapids. After completing a few more courses from the Evangelical Church Alliance in Bradley, Illinois, he received a Pastoral Theological Degree and was ordained January 6, 1989 in the Social Brethren Church in Bradley by the Evangelical Church Alliance.

The old sound system, installed when the church was built in 1963, has been upgraded through the years. It was moved from the upstairs at the front the church to the balcony in 1985. In 1989 the congregation approved having a new sound system installed. Much of the labor was donated, including the wiring, the hand crafted cabinet that hangs about the pulpit, and the beautiful hand crafted oak cabinet that hold the components and the high speed two-tape duplicating machine. Many hours of volunteer service are given by those working with the sound system and tape recorder. Regular worship services were recorded, as well as special services such as cantatas, weddings, and funerals. Anyone could borrow or buy a tape of these services held in the church sanctuary. A dedication service for the new sound system was held March 4, 1990.

Since 1957, during the summer months, the youth of our church have experienced fun and fellowship as they attend the Reformed Church Youth Camp located in Frankfort, Illinois North of the Sauk Trail. Each year, for the better part of a week, boys and girls from the third grade through high school attend this camp. Some of our young people have also served as camp counselors.

With the help of sponsors and co-sponsors, Dan and Linda Averill have organized many programs and activities for both the Sr. RCYF and Jr. RCYF. In 1989 the Jr. RCYF meeting was changed from Wednesday evening to 4:30 Sunday afternoon. Sr. RCYF meeting follows the Sunday evening worship service.

In addition to community events sponsored by the Sr. RCYF, such as ice cream socials and fall clean-up days, some members have experienced fellowship with other young

people by attending conventions in Washington D.C. A mission outreach for the Sr. RCYF is to sponsor a young girl who lives in Bangalore, India. Another mission is the Jackson County Ministries, in Annville, Kentucky. this was a new experience as a group of high school boys and girls went to Annville to help the need the summer of 1990. There was satisfaction in helping others, plus a lot of good clean fun. The mission trip was repeated the summer of 1992.

While attending "Winterfest," (a youth fellowship sponsored by the Synod of Mid-America of the RCA), Dan Fields, one of the young people, was selected to be a Youth Ambassador to Japan. Dan was in Japan 15 days the summer of 1991.

Child Evangelism Fellowship, and interdenominational faith organization, is a fellowship of Christians dedicated to the task of winning boys and girls to Christ. The purpose of the CEF is to increase the amount of spiritual training for children in the church and to present the gospel to unreached children. This program for children ages 5 to 12 was started by Dan Averill in our church in 1990. The children met once a month during the school year on Saturday afternoons from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. They have games, a Bible story, maybe a video, and some songs, plus cookies and punch. Approximately 30 children attended the CEF, half of them from outside our church.

Deeper Spiritual Life meetings held annually in the spring began in the early years of the church. Known then as Week of Prayer, our own minister would deliver the messages in English three consecutive evenings and one afternoon in Dutch. Later the name was changed to Evangelistic Services. An evangelistic speaker would be invited each year to conduct services.

As spring is a time of regrowth, so the Deeper Spiritual Life meetings challenged the congregation in spiritual growth. During the annual meeting in 1989, Terry Hall directed our travel through 4,000 years from creation to Christ. We learned the 77 key steps in a "Walk Thru the Old Testament."

Today, the annual meetings start Friday evenings following a congregational potluck dinner. Saturday evening is a time for the speaker to meet with the young people. The three day theme climaxes at the Sunday morning and evening services.

At the Thanksgiving service in 1990, members who made profession of faith 50 years ago or more, were honored. Each one listed a favorite hymn, along with a special scripture verse. Throughout the year as these members celebrate birthdays, they are recognized and their favorite hymn is sung during the Sunday evening worship service.

This has become an annual event on Thanksgiving honoring members as they reach their 50th year in Christ.

The RCW Women's Guild, with a current membership of 50 women, was divided into three circles for monthly Bible study. Through their efforts many programs were introduced. The women were instrumental in starting an annual Lenten breakfast, a special Guest Night, converting two Sunday School rooms into a church nursery, prayer chains, and service groups, fresh flowers in the sanctuary at worship services, and remembrances of shut-ins. The RCW Women's Guild prepares an annual Mother/Daughter Banquet. This special event started soon after the church was built in 1930. Committees meet early in the year as they plan the program, theme, decorations, and the dinner, which are well kept secrets until the night of the banquet. This is a special time for daughters as they attend for the first time when in the 7th grade. The men of the church do the serving.

Early in 1991 our country was involved in "Desert Storm," a war in the Persian Gulf. Although our church had two members in uniform, we are thankful none were in combat in the war of only six weeks.

The Fellowship Hall Sunday School class sponsored a food drive the Sunday before Thanksgiving in 1991. The response was over-whelming as people brought their donations on this snowy cold day. These gifts were distributed to the Bible Witness Camp in Pembroke and the food pantry of the Salvation Army in Kankakee.

Children's Church during the Sunday morning worship service began on a trial basis Palm Sunday, 1989. For two years this was held twice a month for children three to five years old.

Since May 1992, Children's Church has been held each Sunday except when communion is served, and the fifth Sunday.

During the summer months flowers in the sanctuary were donated by one family for approximately 50 years. In the 1940's Mr. and Mrs. Schaafsma stated providing gladioli arrangements for the Sunday services. Mr. and Mrs. Arthur F. Schaafsma followed their parents in this tradition with glads and other varieties of flowers. After the death of Art Schaafsma, his wife Cora, continued supplying bouquets for the sanctuary during the flowering season. This continued through 1991. For many years, at Thanksgiving, Cora arranged a harvest scene of our bountiful blessings. Since then this ministry has continued through the continued efforts of the families within the church.

1994-Present

The First Reformed Church of Wichert is still continuing to do the Lord's work to this day with the help of all of its members. Therefore our history is still being written.